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THE MEDICAL OFFICER
OF THE UNITED STATES
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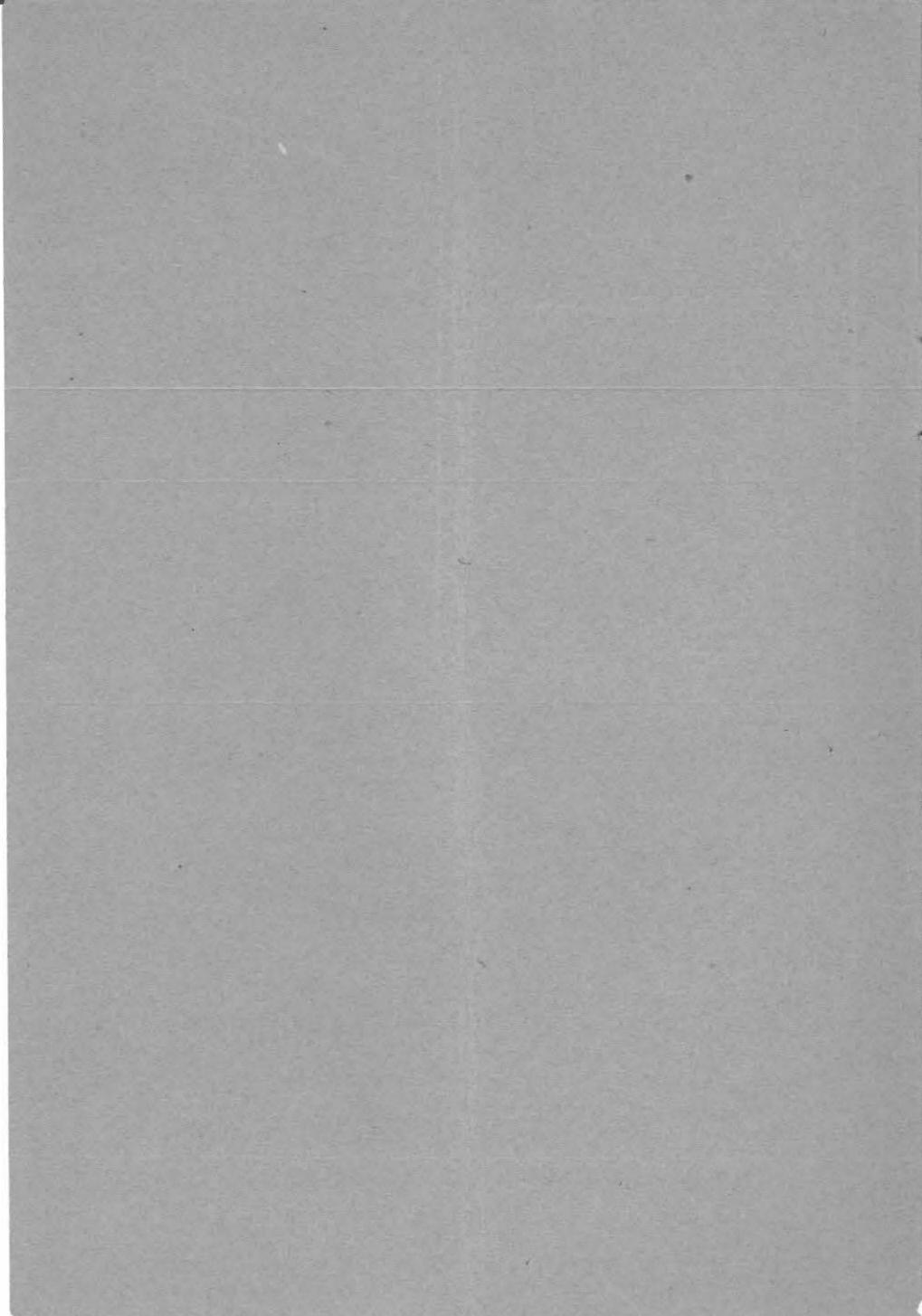
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BY

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NEW HAVEN, CONN.

Reprint from the MEDICAL RECORD,
June 20, 1903.

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The navy is the nation's sea army. Officers and men lead a military life in their mobile castle of steel surrounded by the ocean. They are subject to the same military laws (with changes incident to the variety of service) that the army obeys. But the least understood of all officers of a battleship is the surgeon.

The United States Navy Medical Officer must be a "many-sided man." His literary and professional requirements are exceptionally severe. Uncle Sam demands men physically perfect and free from inherited taint. The young surgeon will ascertain that foreign languages, diplomacy, and elegance of manner are essential if he wishes to be an officer, gentleman, and a regular. The ships of the navy visit every quarter of our little globe. Diseases peculiar to climatic conditions will be encountered, and the surgeon must be master of the situation. All varieties of classified and non-classified conditions fall to his lot. As a broadening process, he has the advantage over his brother ashore to a certain extent.

Duties.—The duty of paramount importance is the health of the ship's company or station. On shipboard the surgeon must examine the sick bay dispensary, medical store rooms, holds, sleeping quarters, and water-tight compartments. His shore duty implies strict sanitary inspection of the Naval

Hospital, its grounds and appurtenances thereof, together with the healthful arrangement of officers' quarters, marine barracks, and the naval prison, if the yard contains one. All boys, men and cadets, he must examine as to the physical qualifications for the service. He must ascertain if vaccination is required and perform the same. Food and water brought aboard in a foreign port, he must analyze as to its fitness for consumption by the ship's company. He must keep a medical journal of the entire cruise—subject any time to inspection by his captain or the ranking surgeon—and send it in quarterly with his report to the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery at Washington, no matter where his ship may be.

The captain shall be informed by him daily at 10 A.M., in writing, of the names and conditions of the sick.

The surgeon must, at all times, hold himself in readiness to attend the sick and wounded. He shall, when ordered, distribute tourniquets, and instruct both officers and men in their use. If an American merchantman applies for help in a foreign or home port, the surgeon must answer the summons, provided it does not endanger the health of his ship's company. Once every week the medical officer, in company with the executive, must personally inspect the holds, living spaces, and staterooms and report the same to his captain. The health of the crew he must always have in mind. Spirits and liquors, the property of the government, shall never be ~~be~~ trusted to the care of enlisted men, except when needed for the sick, and then to be immediately consumed.

His surgical instruments, he cannot dispose of at his pleasure, but must institute a board of survey, who, if they see fit, will condemn and recommend later designs. When his ship goes out of commis-

sion after a long cruise, he must execute an inventory of all medical stores incident to a vessel of war and a medical officer, and transfer the same to the senior medical officer of the station.

¹On entering a foreign port, the surgeon shall exhibit his bill of health of his ship's company to the medical officer of the port, and must make, in writing, a report of all diseases, epidemics, and other conditions peculiar to the place for transmission to the Surgeon-General of the Navy.

At summary court-martials where confinement is necessary, he must advise if the wayward Jackies' health will be impaired by restriction in diet.

Landing parties on foreign and savage shores are frequent. The surgeon's resources, packed in a small box, are all that is essential for emergency. Such are a few of the multifarious duties of a doctor in the navy.

The smallest cork, bottle, and piece of gauze being the property of his government, he is responsible for and must account for the same or stand the consequences.

When the order "clear ship for action" is trumpet-brayed and drum-vibrated through the ship, and the steam siren screams in weird vehemence "close water-tight compartments," and the rush of 500 to 600 men—the roar of the engines and of a sudden silence pervades all parts of the great ship, whose funnels are vomiting clouds of black smoke as she cleaves old ocean ready to fight—we find the surgeon calmly awaiting the gallant fellows from the decks above, that will be brought to him, screaming, mangled, and spattering blood as they come. While combating hemorrhages and binding up his patient, a shell may rip through the bulkhead carrying him and his man into eternity.

²Surgeon-General Rixey, U. S. Navy, observes "the first aid will have to be given on the battleships by

medical officers in different portions of the ship. Most of the operative work will have to be done after the battle is over, which, in most cases between large ships, would be of short duration." The naval surgeon in a sea battle operates on a constantly heaving table. His decks, platform, or floor, whatever name it may be called, is not still a minute.

The recoil of the great guns is transmitted to all parts of the ship, severe trembling ensues, hence a steady hand, quick ratiocination, perfect instrumentality, commensurate to the incessant heaving and throbbing, are essential.

³Mr. Richard Harding Davis, in his excellent little work, mentions the surgeons so handsomely in his inimitable style that the profession owes him a debt of gratitude. He says: "Taylor, a young gunner's mate, was shot on April 26 (1898) by a revolver. It was an accident, but it is possible he was more seriously hurt than was any of the six wounded men who went through the seven hours' battle at Manila. Junior-Surgeon Spear said that if he had tried to dodge the vital parts in Taylor's body with a surgical instrument, he could not have done it as skilfully as did the bullet, which was neither aimed nor guided by human hand. It was Junior-Surgeon Spear who performed the operation, while the fleet surgeon, Dr. Gravett watched him and advised. It was a wonderful operation. It lasted nearly two hours, and it left the layman uncertain as to whether he should the more admire the human body or the way a surgeon masters it. What they did to Taylor I cannot tell in technical language, but I know they cut him open and lifted out his stomach and put it back again, and sewed him up twice . . . that these parts of himself had been picked over and handled as a man runs his fingers over the keys of a piano and had then been pushed and wedged back into place and covered

over as one would sew a patch on an old sail, to lie hidden away again for many, many years more."

"The operation herein described was a success. The boy recovered.

Abdominal surgery under the most favorable conditions is delicate work.

"The slightest deviation means unnecessary damage, perhaps death to your patient."

⁶Rear Admiral R. D. Evans, U. S. N., gives unstinted praise to the surgeon who attended him. He observes: "My shoulder was badly smashed and dislocated, but the excellent medical men soon wiped the blood off and reduced the dislocation."

⁶During the chase of the *Colon* by the *Brooklyn* on July 3, 1898, we find Dr. DeValin, U. S. N., was so near Yoeman Ellis that when the latter was killed he was spattered with his blood. The medical officer is not always out of harm's way as some have asserted. [REDACTED]

The surgeon in our large cities does his work on a steady foundation. No extraneous uproar will blight the fair prospect of his success.

Nurses, assistants, good lights, and solutions abound—in fact, every appliance known to the curative art are at his command, and when his work is done he is aware that perfect rest will be obtained for his patient.

⁷If one imagines when observing the great white ships of our navy gliding majestically through the ocean, that all is quiet aboard, let him change his mind. A warship of to-day seems almost a sentient being, mechanical devices are its nerves and arteries, its mentality, electric forces. Here, surrounded by dangers that a reckless "laying on of hands" may start into activity, dwell our officers and men. The surgeon, a silent, thoughtful entity, is quietly watching his portion of this little world, the living part of the machine.

On shore stations, navy yards, there may be found extensive machine shops and a well-equipped naval hospital. Injuries incident to machinery abound. The families of the officers give ample variety for medical work—particularly the women and children. So, ashore, his duties are not lightened but multiplied. In Washington a naval medical officer is always stationed to attend to the families of the officers. The present incumbent, being one of the most distinguished in the corps, Medical Inspector William S. Dixon, U. S. N. At all official receptions, whether ashore, shipboard, foreign service or at Washington, the medical officer must carry out his part of the program with his brother officers, the gentlemen of the line.

As he "ships", with line officers, he makes many friends that are life-long.

If he is taken away, the brothers of his corps and these same line officers, stand by his widow and children—an impenetrable, honorable, and sturdy wall of loyal friendship that is never tarnished by the ravages of time.

If he gains the age limit, his rank is commensurate, and when Uncle Sam politely, gently, and gratefully tells him he is sixty-two years old, he finds himself honored and respected, a retired officer and a gentleman of the navy of the United States.

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